British
HUMANIST
Association

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Moral education in secondary schools

A SUGGESTED SYLLABUS (11-18)

Aims

To help children to grow from dependence on paternal authority to independence and co-operation
To develop in them an expanding sense of community
To help them to make a critical appraisal of the society in which they live
To train them to think for themselves while avoiding the fallacy that any conclusion they reach is absolute and final
To develop sympathetic understanding and respect for other people
To foster a sense of right and wrong growing from their awareness of the world and of the needs of others

Organisation and method

It will be seen from these aims that Moral Education is thought of not as a set of precepts, but as a combination of factual knowledge about the environment, and personal experience of co-operation in society. Knowledge of the universe and of humanity's place in it, coupled with an awareness of the relationship of the individual to his own community and to other individuals, form the essential basis for the appreciation of social and moral obligations. These two themes run through all that follows.

Since it is unlikely that ethics can be taught to children below the age of 15 or so, periods should not be used for this specific purpose, but ethical awareness should arise rather from the daily activities and discussions of the class. Thus it would grow from the lives of the children instead of being imposed from above as an abstract and boring 'subject'.

Learning about the world

Lessons would include material from history, biology, geography, general science, etc., several members of staff sharing in the course. About half of the time available should be devoted to this instruction, together with discussions arising from the children's questions on the material given.

The instruction should cover, as factually as possible, what children need to know in order to understand themselves and their environment and to find their place in the story of humanity. This will often have to be in the form of lessons by teachers, but much can be done through individual and group projects, visits to museums, etc., and surveys conducted by the children themselves.

Learning by experience

The other half of the time should then be used for the consideration together of community problems as they arise, and any other interests the children have. It is important that they should discuss things that matter to them, for learning arises from the satisfaction of curiosity. Social, that is, moral values will also best be discovered in this way.

The teacher will probably have to demonstrate chairmanship and advise on procedure, but he should withdraw into the background as soon as possible, leaving the children to elect their own chairman, and becoming a source of information which they may tap if they wish, and a Socratic 'prodder' when necessary.

In junior forms there will probably be much discussion of class and school affairs, rules of conduct, democratic procedure, misdemeanours, etc., out of which an early appreciation of motivation, mutual responsibility and social justice will grow. Later, young people may become interested in local affairs and extend their responsibility and their service to a wider range of people and institutions, local, national and international.

The whole course could be called 'Social Studies' and could use from 1 to 5 periods a week, depending on other demands on time in the particular school. Classes might with benefit be unstreamed. All pupils in the same year might meet together from time to time, and the whole school should assemble for topics of common interest. The Social Studies periods for each year of the age-range might therefore be time-tabled to coincide; and the time now normally set aside for 'Assembly' could sometimes be used for whole-school meetings on specific themes.

Content of the syllabus

Not all the material in the year-by-year syllabus set out below will be useful for all classes. Teachers will naturally select items and the depth to which they should be studied, according to the ability and interests of their pupils.

Some books are suggested in each section, in the hope that they may be helpful, mainly to the teacher.

Sex education

This is of the first importance, since so much of the guilt and distress that young (and older) people suffer arises from errors in early sex teaching and experience. Though much of the responsibility lies in the home during the pre-school years, the school should do what it can to induce a healthy outlook. Staff should always be prepared to discuss any sex questions with the children provided they can do so without embarrassment and without moralizing.

It is thought undesirable to treat this topic as an isolated 'course'. It should be a natural part of the discovery of nature and self. As with other topics, several teachers may have contributions to make. Help from outside the school is available if necessary, through Schools TV and speakers from, for example, the National Marriage Guidance Council, but it is probably better if the topic is dealt with internally rather than made to seem separate and special.

Since the subject continues throughout the school, it is not included in the year-by-year syllabus. It is suggested that the principle to be followed is that accurate factual information should be given before young people are faced with the need for action and decision, and before a false picture is given by juvenile gossip or the mass media. If we do not tell children the truth, they will absorb falsehood.

In addition to the imparting of information, it is hoped that an attitude might be established which raises sex above mere clinical fact, and accepts it as a source of physical, emotional and intellectual delight, so that young people may no longer see sex as something secret and shameful, but as one of the happiest and most rewarding aspects of human life.

Some useful books:

Sex Education—C. Bibby (Macmillan)
Sex in Society—A. Comfort (Penguin)
The Anxiety Makers—A. Comfort (Nelson)
Eros Denied—W. Young (Weidenfeld & Nicolson)
Patterns of Sexual Behaviour—Ford & Beach (Methuen)
A Textbook of Sex Education—Julia Dawkins (Blackwell)

Film strips:

Common Ground Ltd: *Sex Education*—C. Bibby
Part 1 How Life is Handed On
Part 2 Human Reproduction
Camera Talks Ltd: *Sex Education* (2 parts)
Human Development

Films:

Learning to Live
Boy to Man (Boulter Hawker Films)
Women of Tomorrow (Sound Services Ltd.)

First year

THE UNIVERSE—FINDING OUT WHERE WE ARE

The story of man's discoveries and changing theories. The solar system; Ptolemaic and Copernican models; Galileo. The present view. What can we discover next? Space travel; science fiction.

Film:

Earth and Sky (EFVA)

Visits:

Science Museum, Planetarium

Books:

The Stars in their Courses—James Jeans (Cambridge University Press 1931)

The Frontiers of Astronomy—Fred Hoyle (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.)

The City and the Stars—Arthur C. Clarke (Corgi Books)

Earth is Room Enough—Isaac Asimov (Panther Books)

The Man Who Sold The Moon—Robert Heinlein (Pan Books Ltd.)

The Fabric of the Heavens—Toulmin and Goodfield (Penguin)

Second year

MANKIND—FINDING OUT HOW WE CAME

The beginning of life on earth. Evolution: the family tree. Digging up the past: fossils; archaeology; early civilisations. The social organisation of Man: clan, tribe, village, family, city, state. The future: Man's responsibility for the future of evolution on this planet.

Visits:

Geological Museum
Natural History Museum
British Museum
The Zoo
a 'dig' (advice from British Archaeological Society)

Wall Charts:

The evolutionary tree
Time-scales (see *Last and First Men*)

Books:

Lost Worlds—A. T. White (Random House, USA)

The Ancient East and its Story—J. Baikie

Climbing our Family Tree—A. Novikoff (International Publications)

Digging up the Past—Sir Leonard Woolley (Benn (Ernest) Ltd.)

Last and First Men—Olaf Stapledon (Penguin)

Breakthrough—John Iggulden (Four Square Books)

Third year

PEOPLE—FINDING OUT ABOUT OURSELVES AND ONE ANOTHER

Heredity: the innate basis of man's social tendencies. Environment: family, friends, groups, teachers, authority; adaptability and co-operation; the social basis of moral values. The mind; the conscience.

Books:

The Fraternal Society—R. and H. Hauser (Bodley Head Ltd.)
Mutual Aid—P. Kropotkin (Penguin)
Psychopathology of Everyday Life—S. Freud (Penguin)
What Life Should Mean to You—A. Adler (Allen and Unwin)

Fourth year

UNDERSTANDING OUR PLACE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN LIFE

CLEAR THINKING

Elementary logic, kinds of statement; values, evidence and truth.

Books:

Ten Non-Commandments—R. Fletcher (Pioneer Press)
Straight and Crooked Thinking—R. K. Thouless (Pan Books Ltd.)
Learning to Think—E. R. Emmet (Longmans)
Thinking to some Purpose—Susan Stebbing
Language and the Pursuit of Truth—J. Wilson (Cambridge University Press)
The Comforts of Unreason—R. Crawshay-Williams (Kegan Paul)

RELIGIONS—A BRIEF SURVEY OF THEIR ORIGIN AND GROWTH

Primitive ignorance and fear. Need for security, dreams of immortality. Examples of good and harm caused by religions. Infancy and adolescence of mankind; Humanism; science; learning to live with reality.

Book:

The Humanist Revolution—Hector Hawton (Pemberton Publishing Co. Ltd.)

SOME PROBLEMS

(Any of these that have not been covered in discussions earlier might be dealt with now, before the leaving age.) Starting work, family difficulties, friends male and female, independence, delinquency, corporal and capital punishment, euthanasia, race prejudice, war, international co-operation, propaganda, the Admass, conditioning, authoritarianism and democracy, censorship.

Books:

Battle for the Mind—W. Sargant (Pan Books Ltd.)
The Hidden Persuaders—Vance Packard (Penguin)
Authority & Delinquency in the Modern State—A. Comfort (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.)

Fifth year

OUR WORLD AND ITS PROBLEMS

Wide variation in social customs and values. Tolerance. Attempt at formulation of moral principles.

Books:

Freedom and Reason—R. M. Hare (Oxford University Press)
Patterns of Culture—Ruth Benedict (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.)
Patterns of Sexual Behaviour—Ford and Beach (Eyre and Spottiswoode)
Growing Up in New Guinea—Margaret Mead (Penguin)
Coming of Age in Samoa—Margaret Mead (Penguin)

LOCAL AFFAIRS

Surveys of local problems; e.g. poverty, housing the old, educational opportunity, youth clubs, leisure activity. Driving lessons might lead to consideration of town planning, transport, road safety.

Visits:

Local Council, Education Committee, Magistrate's Court, etc., House of Commons.

Visiting speakers:

Departments of the local authority, police, clubs, societies (eg CND), Young Conservatives, Young Socialists.

Sixth form

PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD

On the basis of what has happened in the previous five years, sixth formers should be in a position to discover for themselves most of what they need at this level, and their course should be a mixture of group surveys, guided study, and individual projects. Many topics touched on in the earlier years could now be dealt with more thoroughly. These are some of the possibilities.

PSYCHOLOGY

A summary of the major developments, including the insights of Freud ; Adler ; Jung ; McDougall ; Behaviourism ; Pavlov, etc.—leading to a study of a particular theme : child development, personality, human relations, delinquency—or to consideration of some topical questions : intelligence tests, teaching machines, cybernetics, hypnotism, extra-sensory perception, dreams . . .

SOCIAL STUDIES

Freedom and authority ; an examination of self-control, discipline, persuasion, supra-national authority, fraternalism. Advertising, conditioning, brain-washing. Sex and Society ; a study of personal, social and moral aspects of sexual drives and attitudes. Service. From their experience in the lower school, and the social responsibility they have gained, should arise a desire to contribute fully to their local community. They should also by now be quite capable or organizing and conducting the affairs of the school.

WORLD QUESTIONS

Some topics : nationalism, international problems such as Vietnam and Rhodesia ; foreign aid and home comforts ; automation ; common values of the human species ; world citizenship ; feeding mankind ; synthetic food ; birth control ; the control of disease ; the future of evolution ; sperm-banks and selective breeding ; the prolongation of active life ; spare-part surgery.

Work on some of these could proceed side by side with co-operation in such activities as the Council for Education in World Citizenship, national and local courses and conferences for sixth-formers, the United Nations Association.

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